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ABSTRACT

To investigate the current attitudes of Mississippi public school teachers toward the use of militant, collective actions, 600 randomly selected elementary and secondary teachers were asked to complete the Teacher's Attitude Scale and a demographic data sheet. A total of 450 responses were received, representing a 75 percent return rate. The collected data were analyzed descriptively, and two hypotheses--drawn in part from a review of related literature--were tested using a multiple regression/correlation technique; both hypotheses were accepted. The findings indicated that teachers' attitudes were significantly related to certain demographic variables and that race, gender, and age each made small but significant contributions to attitudinal differences. Specifically, African-American public school teachers tended to have more unfavorable attitudes toward the use of militant, collective actions, while male teachers (far outnumbered by female teachers in Mississippi) had more positive attitudes regarding collective actions. Additionally, teachers between 30 and 40 years of age responded most favorably to the use of militant, collective actions. (26 references) (KM)

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# ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF MILITANT, COLLECTIVE ACTIONS: A STUDY OF MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the current attitudes of public school teachers in the State of Mississippi toward the use of militant, collective actions. Four-hundred and fifty elementary and secondary level teachers, representing a 75% response rate from the 600 randomly selected sample, completed the Teachers' Attitude Scale, and a demographic data sheet. The data were analyzed descriptively and then two hypotheses were tested using a multiple regression/correlation technique. Both hypotheses were accepted. Findings indicated that teachers' attitudes were significantly related to the selected demographic variables, and that race, gender, and age, each, made small, but significant, contributions to the attitudinal differences. The importance of the findings was discussed.

# Attitudes Toward the Use of Militant, Collective Actions: A Study of Mississippi Public School Teachers

The growth of teacher unionism during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, according to West (1972), might be traced to the manner in which teachers perceived themselves to be treated within the school organizations in which they worked. According to Boulter, Leonard, and Williams (1989), during the 1930's the status given to teachers was the "principal forms of public payment which teachers enjoyed" (p. 171). However, as the decline of status afforded to teachers declined, union memberships increased. What began as a small union movement in the 1930's found itself growing, and by the decade of the 1960's, school districts began to experience wave after wave of incidences of teacher militancy.

Argyris' (1969) theory proposed that collective actions, such as collective bargaining, striking, and imposing sanctions, can be viewed as adaptive behaviors that are used by workers (i.e., teachers) to resolve conflicts that they believe to exist between the administration and themselves. He stated that "adults who work within organizational structures are, all too frequencyly, treated like children. They are denied their very natural and legitimate needs for independence (i.e., autonomy), equality, ascendency, integrity, and creativity" (p. 196).

In the northeast, upper midwest, and far west, teachers'

organizations, in efforts to gain some redress for perceived unsatisfactory working conditions or administrator-teacher relations, agitated for and won the right to engage in collective negotiations with local school boards. Where it appeared that local school boards would not bargain in good faith or would not accede to the "demands" of the teachers, communities were hit with a behavioral phenomena that was new and totally unexpected. Teachers' organizations began to call for strikes and other collective actions and teachers responded in large numbers to the call.

Fagan (1978) noted that it was during the decade of the 1960s that collective bargaining was to become almost common place for America's public school teachers, those affiliated with the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, as well as other organizations. In the 1968-1969 school year alone, there were 131 teacher strikes, involving teachers in 24 states and Washington, D.C. In the 1969-1970 school year, there were 181 teacher strikes, an increase of 28%. Teachers' collective militant behavior gradually became the norm in all parts of the United States except for the southeastern region.

The notion of teacher militancy, because it was a new concept, greatly interested students of organizational behavior and they lost little time in gearing up to study this new brand of teacher behavior within school organizations. These studies

attempted, for example, to ascertain information about teachers' attitudes toward taking collective actions (Fris, 1979; Lutz, 1973; Spaulding, 1973), about relationships between school climate and teacher militancy (Conklin, 1981), about the effects of teacher militancy on school administration (Logan, 1979), about the relationships between teacher strikes on student achievement (Moskalski, 1981), about the effects of collective bargaining on teachers' salaries (Tefertiller, 1981), and about relationships between school organizational structure and teacher militancy (Dahlquist, 1981; McDannel, 1973).

Kephart (1981) found that teachers in his research sample were largely ambivalent about the use of bargaining tactics. Spaulding (1973), who investigated militancy among elementary school teachers, and Lutz (1973), who studied militancy among secondary school teachers, found that teachers were less militant in schools where the teachers perceived the principal to exhibit high representative rule administration.

Conklin's (1981) findings suggested that gender is a better predictor of teacher militancy and that middle age teachers (e.g., between 30-40 years of age) were more militant than their younger or older teacher peers. He concluded that male teachers had more positive attitudes toward teacher militancy than did female teachers.

The state of Mississippi is one of a small number of

states in which teacher militancy, as yet, does not cause great concern among school administrators either at the state or local levels. While there are active teacher's organizations which, yearly, represent these educators before the Education Committee of the State Legislature, these organizations, until 1985, had been rather reticent to resort to group actions to gain their demands.

In the Spring of 1985, however, a large group of teachers from all over the State of Mississippi converged on the Capitol in an effort to meet with their representatives in the legislature. They wanted to voice their concerns about perceived unsatisfactory conditions under which they were employed. While the news media focused on the teachers' call for salary increases, in reality, they had other more important concerns. They were protesting the lack of adequate and quality textbooks, the lack of sufficient inventories of books and supplies, the lack of administrative support of their instructional efforts, and the lack of adequate procedures to decrease the disciplinary problems that they faced daily in their classrooms (Denley, 1985).

Since the 1985 "Teachers' March on the Capitol" (Jackson Daily, 1985), there have been no further incidences of teachers engaging in statewide or even districtwide collective actions. After making such a dramatic show of influence, why did the teachers fail to follow through and demand that the

state approve the right for them to use collective bargaining as a means to gain resolutions to some of their concerns? Weidie (1985) speculated that there were certain weaknesses that were inherent in the teachers' organizations at that time. He suggested that:

1. At least one of the three teachers' organizations (i.e., Mississippi Professional Educators) would not even consider becoming a participant in the planned collective actions.
2. The public relations strategies that the teachers' organizations used were counterproductive to the very thing that teachers seemed to want.
3. Neither of the three organizations had the political clout to influence the state's legislature. (p. 4A)

This researcher, while giving tacit agreement to Weidie's hypothesis, introduces another notion. Might the teachers in Mississippi not be favorably disposed to engage in collective, militant activities? The present research represents an effort to ascertain just what are Mississippi teachers' attitudes toward the use of militant behaviors. What follows are the research questions that provided the focus to this investigation.

1. What are the attitudes of teachers in Mississippi toward the use of collective actions?

2. Where differences in teachers' attitudes toward the use of collective action does exist, can these differences be explained by certain selected demographic variables?
3. Might the previous research findings apply to teachers in the State of Mississippi?

As used in this investigation, teacher militancy "refers to teacher participation in collective negotiations with school boards concerning salary and conditions of employment, as well as the overt activism of participation in strikes and work slowdowns" (Fagan, 1978, p. 28).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a body of theoretical and supportive research literature that posit the notion that certain patterns of organizations (e.g., positions, roles, role expectations, and rules and regulations) which in interaction with the perceived unfilled needs of the organizational members seem to contribute to the members' propensity to engage in collective militant behaviors such as agitating, sanctioning, and striking). Evans' (1966) "Theory of Teacher Collective Organizational Behavior" provided the frame of reference for this study. The theory posits a model that consists of three components: (a) Teacher Organizational "Mind Set," (b) Organizational Structure, and (c) Administrative

Authority. Specifically, the theory attempts to explain why the collective behavior of teachers takes on different forms and directions in seemingly similar situations. Through this theoretical perspective, schools are viewed as formal organizations and teachers are seen as having attitudes and values similar to members of other formal organizations.

Evans (1966) theory was tested and found to provide a powerful perspective from which to view the collective behaviors of teachers within school organizations by Kephart (1981). Kephart found significant relations between certain selected demographic data, teachers job satisfaction, and teachers' attitudes toward militancy. It should be noted that both Evans' and Gephart's research were done using teachers who were already members of the United Federation, many of whom might have participated in the collective actions that hit New York City during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s.

This investigation focused only on the first component of Evans' (1966) theory--the "Organizational Mind Set"--because of the interest in ascertaining the attitudes of teachers, as members of formal school organization, toward the notion of using collective, militant actions that are aimed at the offices that control public school education at the state and local levels. Additionally, based on the findings of Boulter, Leonard, and Williams (1989) that of the 226 teachers who responded to a survey instrument, only 94 belonged to some

teachers' organization, this investigator believed that it would be instructive to see if, after the events of 1985, Mississippi teachers' attitudes toward being involved in collective, militant behaviors as a means of resolving their concerns had, for them, become an accepted option.

The following hypotheses were the outcome of the previous discussion:

1. Teachers' attitudes toward the use of collective actions will be significantly related to age, gender, race, highest degree earned, teaching experience, and level of teaching assignment.
2. Age, Gender, race, highest degree earned, teaching experience, and level of teaching assignment will contribute, independently, to differences in teachers' attitudes toward the use of collective actions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Population and Research Sample

Individual public school teachers who were employed in kindergarten through 12th grade comprised the population of interest and. therefore, the individual teacher was the the unit of analyses. From this population, a total of 600 teachers were randomly selected and, after gaining written

permissions from their superintendents and principals, were asked to cooperate in the study. Four-hundred and fifty or, 75%, of the teachers responded.

Instrumentation

The Teacher Attitude Scale (TAS), developed by Carlton (1966) was used to operationalize the major variable regarding teachers' attitudes about the use of collective actions. The TAS is a 14-item, Likert-type response scale. The responses ranged as follows: Strongly Agree(SA) = 5; Agree (A) = 4; Undecided (U) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; and, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The TAS has scores that can range from a high of 70 to a low of 14. A high score on the TAS represents an unfavorable attitude and a low score indicates a favorable attitude.

Carlton (1966) reported that the TAS had a split-half reliability of .82. The Cronbach alpha reliability that was established in the present investigation was .80. The construct validity of the TAS was studied by this researcher and resulted in a single-factor solution that accounted for approximately 51 percent of the explained variance.

The data were analyzed descriptively to ascertain the manner in which the teachers responded to each of the 14 items in the TAS. Items were analyzed for the emotional intensity of the responses. Shrigley and Koballa (1984) defined emotional

intensity as "that readiness of a teacher to respond favorably or unfavorably toward psychological objects as collective, militant actions" (p. 111). Their discussion of emotional intensity included a rule-of-thumb: responses to any item should not be greater than 25% in the neutral or undecided category.

For the purpose of testing the hypotheses, the data were analyzed through the use of multiple correlation/regression technique. The significance level was set at the .01 level with an adequate power level.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Table 1 shows the percentages of response to the items according to the five-point, Likert-type TAS. A study of these percentages reveals that, individually, teachers do have very definite attitudes about the issues addressed by the TAS items. For example, for items 1, 3, 4, 7. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14, a majority of the respondents showed definite opinions in either the "agree" (4) or "strongly agree" (5) categories. Specifically, 78% of the teachers appear to have strongly agreed or agreed with item #3 that stated: "A good teacher can always get the salary that is needed without resorting to collective negotiations." On the other hand, on item #13, a

small majority of teachers agreed that imposing sanctions on school boards and their administration would improve educational opportunities; while a much greater percent disagreed with the notion addressed by that item. Additional observations can be made regarding items #5 and #13. According to Table 1, 33% and 26%, respectively, of the teachers were undecided about the benefits attributed to imposing sanctions. Even with these sizes of undecided responses, however, there are still satisfactory spreads throughout the other response categories. With the exception of item #5 and #13, all other items meet the emotional intensity criteria as stated by Shrigley and Koballa (1984).

An hypothesis was tested to ascertain the relationships of selected demographic variables to the attitude variable. This analysis indicated that the demographic variables did account for a modest, but highly significant, 13.7% of the explained variance in teachers' attitudes toward the use of collective actions ($R^2$ = .137, $F$[9,440] = 7.742, $p$ < .001).

The test of the second hypothesis produced the following significant findings. Race was the foremost contributor to the variance in the TAS scores ($R^2$ = .054, $F$[1,448] = 25.742, $p$< .0000). African-American public school teachers expressed more unfavorable attitudes toward the use of collective action

($\overline{X}$ = 51.97) than did their European-American counterparts ($\overline{X}$ = 45.01).

Gender followed race as a small, but significant, contributor to variance in the attitude variable ($R^2$ = .035, $F[1.488]$ = 16.382, $p < .0001$). Male teachers tended to have more favorable attitudes ($\overline{X}$ = 46.26) than did females ($\overline{X}$ = 51.61) teachers.

Age made a small, but significant, contribution to the variance in the TAS responses ($R^2$ = .024, $F[4,445]$ = 6.945, $p < .0000$). There were significant differences between the five categories. Teachers between the ages of 31-40 tended to have the most favorable attitude toward the use of collective actions ($\overline{X}$ = 40.56). Neither of the remaining demographic variables (i.e., highest degree earned, teaching experience, and level of teaching assignment) made significant, independent contributions to the variance in the TAS scores.

## Discussion

The present investigation sought to identify the attitudes that Mississippi public school teachers hold toward the use of collective bargaining and to determine the demographic variables that might contribute to attitudinal differences. The attitude variable was operationalized through the use of the Teacher Attitude Scale, a 14-item, Likert-type scale with five response points. Prior to

testing the hypotheses, the data were subjected to validity and reliability analyses that resulted in a single factor scale that explained approximately 51% of the scale's variance and a Cronbach alpha reliability of .80.

At first, the researcher thought that a figure showing the various mean score responses would be sufficient to indicate Mississippi teachers attitudes toward the use of collective actions. However, this table proved to be somewhat misleading in that it appeared to portray a group of teachers who were more undecided about the notions espressed in the items. Consequently a study of the frequency of responses given by the teachers was deemed to be more instructive.

The analysis of the responses to each item on the TAS seems to suggest that, at least in this study's research sample, the teachers had definite attitudes toward the use of militant, collective actions. This conclusion is supported by the teachers' responses to at least 11 of the 14 TAS items. This assertion is in direct conflict with the findings of Boulter, Leonard, and Williams (1989) who state that "it appears that the teachers in the state from which the sample was drawn were . . . rather ambivalent about teacher unions" (p. 12). Only on the items that expressed notions of the benefits of sanctions and the effects of collective bargaining (items #5 and #7) were teachers undecided.

Hypothesis #1 was accepted. the demographic variables

were significantly related to teachers' attitudes toward the use of collective actions. Although modest in proportion of explained variance, the finding is in keeping with results reported in other similar research (See, for example, Conklin (1981), Giandomenico, 1973, and Macomber. 1980).

The results of the test of hypothesis #2 showed that only three of the selected demographic variables (i.e., race, gender, and age) contributed any significant amount to the explained variance in the attitude variable. There was one surprising finding that will be discussed.

The finding that African-American public school teachers tended to have more unfavorable attitudes toward the use of collective actions was completely unexpected. African-Americans, as a group, seem to believe in, and traditionally, have used collective actions to gain redress from perceived and/or actual civil and equality wrongs. In the past, when

In the past, when Southern African-Americans used collective actions, the actions were usually aimed at addressing some perceived incongruity between what they knew the Constitution and Bill of Rights said and the kinds of interpretations and consequent treatments that they believed were unconstitutional. In these actions, a cross-section of the African-American population was involved. They were expressing a demand for relief from problems that impacted on all African-Americans. However, within the public schools,

where African-American teachers are in the minority, and their perceptions of the "professional teacher" prevails, the data analysis seems to show that these teachers seem to be opposed to becoming actively engaged in actions that they feel are unprofessional.

The findings that resulted from Wells' (1976) study of the propensity of African-American teachers in New York State to engage in militant behavior seems to support the above discussion. He concluded that "militancy is not a serious problem in educational situations involving Black teachers" (p. 2456). He stated that the teachers in his sample had a high professional orientation that focused toward a client (i.e., the student) and therefore, their reluctance to join in union called actions were due to this sense of professionalism.

The finding that male teachers have more positive attitudes toward the use of collective actions is supported by the findings of Conklin (1981) and Kephart (1981). Having stated this finding, it is prudent to recognize that females far outnumber males within the teaching profession in Mississippi. This being the case, it is reasonable to conjecture that men would be more interested in those actions that they perceive would improve their ability to take care of their perceived family responsibilities. However, there is a contradiction. It should be noted that a woman teacher, an

African-American, was one of the leading planners of the first collective activity every held by Mississippi teachers.

Mississippi teachers between the ages of 30 and 40 responded most favorably to the use of collective actions. This finding, too, is supported by the research of Conklin (1981) who found that teachers in the middle age range (i.e., 30-40) tended to hold more positive attitudes toward the use of collections than did teachers in the lower age range or in the higher age range. Although the amount of variance explained was small, it, nevertheless, was significant and was not unlike findings regarding this variable in other atitudinal studies.

Teacher militancy is usually thought of as being counterproductive to the very goala that teachers hope to reach--professional stacus. According to Boulter, Leonard, and Williams (1989), "many teachers would like education to be perceived by the general public as a profession that enjoys social and economic status as do other professions" (p. 13). These teacher wishes were recognized by Evans (1966) who spoke of teachers having expectations of fulfilling some of their psychological needs within the environment of their schools (i.e., The Organizational Mind Set).

The needs of teachers are real. It is apparent from the literature and research that teachers, in some instances, when they believe that their needs are not being met within

the environments of the schools in which they work, are quite willing to resort to collective actions to obtain some relief from their perceived needs deficiencies. Understanding teachers' "organizational mind set" and the behaviors that are likely to emerge when organizational environments and the "mind set" are not congruent might provide administrators with proactive solution to teachers' job-related issues.

There is a generous amount of research findings that identify those aspects of life within a formal school organization that can be used to engender improved job satisfaction or to decrease the amount of job disassisfaction (See, for example, Argyris, 1969; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Maslow, 1954). This notion of proaction has been articulated by Purrington (1970) who suggested that boards of education and school administrators must defign organizations which will adequately meed teachers needs if they are to reduce the level of teacher unrest and militant behaviors. Careful analyses of the schools' organizational patterns, how administrators and teachers relate, how teachers relate to students, and how communities relate to school personnel might uncover areas that need to be changed in order to discover those things that might contribute to a rise in teacher militancy. Dahlquist (1981) added to Purrington's (1970) recommendations by stating, "it is imperative that the local school governing bodies seek postures that place them in

offensive rather an defensive positions in the personnel and fiscal functions of their responsibilities" (3061A). These are major areas of teachers' concerns. Such action, according to Purrington (1970), in removing the sources of unrest, would contribite to the motivation of teachers toward better performance and would tend to reduce walkout behavior and its possible disruptive influence on the education of children and the decrease in community support for the public school systems..

The findings in this investigation all need further study. Mississippi is just entering the phase that will be known as "Reform II." The Honorable Ray Mabus, current Governor of the State of Mississippi, very shortly, will present to the public his views of the kinds of educational delivery systems the States need to become not only nationally, but internationally, competitive. If the Governor is true to his words that he wants greater involvement by salient others in the planning, the implementation, and the evaluation stages, his ideas might prove to be just the kind of proaction that is needed to forestall a replay of the 1985 "Teachers' March on Jackson."

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Table 1
Summary of Item Responses Percentages

| | Items | Combined Response Categories SA+A | U | D+SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Teachers have the right to withhold services | 44 | 20 | 36 |
| 2. | Teachers do not have the right to strike. | 40 | 17 | 43 |
| 3. | A good teacher does not need to negotiate | 78 | 10 | 12 |
| 4. | Collective Bargaining is undignified. | 67 | 14 | 19 |
| 5. | Sanctions foster teacher commitment | 40 | 33 | 27 |
| 6. | Withholding services violates professional ethics. | 43 | 15 | 42 |
| 7. | Collective bargaining erodes local control. | 45 | 28 | 27 |
| 8. | Collective bargaining leads to totalitarianism. | 73 | 15 | 22 |
| 9. | Collective negotiators are insincere power seekers. | 70 | 14 | 16 |
| 10. | Teachers have the right to impose sanctions. | 21 | 15 | 64 |
| 11. | Strikes, Boycotts, etc. are improper procedures. | 50 | 17 | 33 |
| 12 | Anti-strike policies are sensible and defensible. | 58 | 20 | 22 |
| 13. | Sanctions improve educational opportunities. | 51 | 26 | 23 |
| 14. | Coercive measures are unprofessional. | 62 | 14 | 24 |